

## The Paramedic Method

1. Circle the prepositions.
2. Circle the “is” forms
3. Ask, “Where’s the action?” Who’s kicking who?”
4. Put this kicking action in a simple (not compound) active verb.
5. Start fast—no slow windups.
6. Write out each sentence on a blank sheet of paper and mark off its basic rhythmic units with a “/”.
7. Read the passage aloud with emphasis and feeling.
8. Mark off the sentence lengths in the passage with a “/”.

Prepositions include common words such as *in, under, over, by, after, to, on, over, of, with, through, and since.*

## Prepositional-Phrase Strings

In strict contrast to Watson's ability to control his mental stability through this type of internal gesture, is Rosalind Franklin's inability to conceive of such "playing."

The writer discussing James Watson's *The Double Helix* sleepwalks into the standard form of absent minded academic prose: a string of prepositional phrases and infinitives, then a lame "to be," then more prepositional phrases and infinitives. Look at the structure:

*In* strict contrast  
*to* Watson's ability  
*to* control his mental stability  
through this type  
*of* internal gesture,  
**is** Rosalind Franklin's inability  
*to* conceive  
*of* such "playing."

Circle every form of “to be” (“is,” “was,” “will be,” “seems to be,” “have been”) and every prepositional phrase. Then find out who’s kicking who and start rebuilding the sentence with that action. Two prepositional phrases in a row turn on the warning light, three make a problem and four invite disaster. With a little practice, sentences like “The mood Dickens paints is a bleak one” will turn into “Dickens paints a bleak mood” (LF 35%).

Look at these strings from a lawyer, a scientist, and a critic:

Here *is* an example *of* the use *of* the rule *of* justice *in* argumentation.

One *of* the most important results *of* the presentation *of* the data is the alteration *of* the status *of* the elements *of* the discourse.

*In* the light *of* the association *in* the last quarter *of* the sixteenth century *of* wit *with* means *of* amplification, which consist mainly *of* the processes *of* dialectical investigation, this definition probably has more validity than has generally been accorded it.

“Rule of justice” is a term of art, so we must leave it in tact. After we have found an active verb—“exemplify”—buried in “is” an example of the use of, the rest follows easily.

This passage exemplifies argumentation using the rule of justice.

Now, how about the second sentence. It represents a perfect Official Style pattern: string of prepositional phrases + “is” + string of prepositional phrases. Let’s diagram it for emphasis:

One

*of* the most important results  
*of* the presentation  
*of* the data

**is** the alteration

*of* the status  
*of* the elements  
*of* the discourse

See the formulaic character? The monotonous rhythm? The blurred action? I'm not sure what this sentence means, but the action must be buried in "alteration." Start there with an active, transitive verb—"alter."

"Presentation of the data alters the status of the discourse elements"? Or else formally,

"The status of the discourse elements depends on how you present the data."

Or it may mean, "You don't know the status of the elements until you have presented the data."

This definition holds true more than people think, especially considering what wit meant around 1600. (15 words instead of 42; LF 64%)

## “Blah Blah *IS That*” Openings

My contention *is that*...

What I would like to make clear *is that*...

My opinion *is that* on this point we have only two options...

The upshot of what Heidegger says here *is that*...

My opinion *is that* the question of the discourse of the human sciences...

The fact of the matter *is that* the material of this article is drawn directly from...

The one thing that Belinda does not realize *is that* Dorimant knows exactly how to press her buttons.